

Socialist Worker

R.T.E. STRIKE SPECIAL

What this strike is about

SUPPORT THE RTE STRIKERS

THE RTE Authority, under the direction of "axe-man" John Sorohan, is deadly serious and determined to win this dispute. Some in the unions are only half serious.

Ian Cassidy, a SIPTU official, denounces the unity of grades of striking together. Strike committee members are mesmerised by anti-union legislation which lays out the "niceties" of picketing. This will not do. The strikers have to be every bit as bloody-minded as management if we're to stand a chance.

Unity is essential. No divisions between unions, grades, high paid, low paid, should go unchallenged.

Any one section who thinks it can win alone or might settle its own score independently is already beaten. Strike bulletins should stress this point.

Strike leaders must make sure members are *actively* involved, with regular meetings, picket duty, and raising support in the trade union movement.

■ Picketing must be *effective*. Tokenism is not enough. Mass pickets, who actively seek to stop scabbing, are essential. It shows management as well as scabs that we're serious.

Regular mass pickets also give the strikers a sense of solidarity and strength of purpose. Good public relations are fine, but they don't win strikes. Look at the Dunnes workers who struck against

handling South African goods a few years ago—one of the most popular strikes in the history of the state, but it went down to defeat.

■ Mass pickets also act as a focus for solidarity from other workers. Trade union laws which forbid this are only effective if they're not challenged. This strike should seek solidarity from other workers in the form of collections, resolutions of support, and invitations to the mass pickets.

■ The strike committee must help open all options, including occupation, if it is serious about winning. Sorohan knows the score and he's playing for keeps. We have to demonstrate in practice that the strikers at RTE are just as resolute.

THIS strike is the result of management intimidation. The dispute began when management suspended two journalists, Anne Doyne and Janet Martin, for following an instruction from their union, the NUJ.

RTE management had demanded that they work with new two-person camera crews even though no agreement had been reached on their implementation. While the camera operators, members of SIPTU, had agreed to change to two-person crews, no agreement on compensation had been reached. In spite of this, management tried to force their introduction by simple intimidation. A lock-out of two hundred NUJ members began.

SOLIDARITY

Within hours, in an impressive example of solidarity, members of SIPTU, the ETU and the NUJ united to fight the attack. In all, 1,600 strikers are involved.

RTE management have been able to continue a skeleton service by claiming that programme editors and other NUJ members — have "management status" and must continue to work or face dismissal. Three NUJ members who refused to scab on their colleagues have been demoted.

The strikers are demanding that all suspensions and demotions be withdrawn. They also want all those affected by crewing changes to receive a permanent pay rise to compensate for the increased work loads and new responsibilities involved. Management have offered only a lump sum payment of £1,300.

The macho management stance however has

created unprecedented unity amongst all RTE workers. A camera operator affected by the changes told *Socialist Worker*: "For the last few years, especially since Sorohan became chairman, management have been using the big stick against workers in here. We've got to break that stick now or nothing gets solved. Now is the best time to do it, when we're all united."

UNITY

On February 6th in Liberty Hall 1,200 members of SIPTU voted unanimously to reject management's latest proposals, which were basically a rehash of their hardline stance. After the meeting a SIPTU technician told us: "The buzz at that meeting was incredible. I'd got a bit cynical with trade unionism over the years but the solidarity shown today has restored my faith completely. It's the best day in my twenty-six years in RTE."

RTE bosses, however, have now reacted by blatantly interfering in internal union affairs. They have demanded that strikers in the NUJ are prevented from taking disciplinary action against NUJ scabs in RTE (under Union Rule 18).

If not, management will refuse to reinstate those editors it demoted. This disgraceful "deal" must be rejected. It would mean accepting that RTE bosses' so-called "right to manage" includes the right to manage union affairs.

In rejecting all talk of a Joint Industrial Council to settle grievances, management are attempting to smash the union's ability to operate as a trade union and break the new unity. But they can be beaten.



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FIGHTING BACK

By Eamonn McCann, Chair, Derry and North West Branch, NUJ, in a personal capacity.

THERE'S no end of talk in Ireland about politics and the broadcasting media—usually in terms of the alleged bias of broadcasters or the desire of politicians to control coverage. And there are things to be talked about in this regard.

But far more relevant at the moment are the politics of trade unionism in broadcasting.

This raises the question of how workers at RTE saw themselves vis a vis their employer.

To a remarkable extent, RTE workers, most especially journalists, tended to see themselves and management not as naturally antagonistic but as complementary elements, and disputes between workers and management not as an inevitable reflection of the real relationship but as some sort of temporary and regrettable aberration. That is, many RTE workers saw themselves as representatives of the station rather than employees at it.

They had forgotten what *class* they were part of. And that weakened workers' capacity to defend themselves when management rode rough-shod over agreements to attack wages and conditions.

DIVISION

In part, all this resulted from the fact that for decades RTE was a monopoly employer. To a large extent, being a broadcaster *meant* being an RTE broadcaster. Additionally, RTE was a "national institution". And it was structured so that at a certain level the work force seemed to merge into management, with no sharp line of division.

In this situation, it was all the more important for union activists to keep the line of division clearly in sight. And that can best be done—can *only* be done—on the basis of class politics.

We wouldn't doubt that this makes at least a little more sense to RTE workers now than it would have done before the dispute began. Class politics always come more clearly into view when you're looking at the world from a picket line.

Likewise, the class politics of management are more obvious. The parallel with Wapping has already been drawn, and it's apt.

The thing is, though: nobody ever doubted that Rupert Murdoch was an anti-working class hooligan who would put the boot in on his "own" workers at any opportunity. But RTE management? That they would turn out to be hate-figures in exactly the same mould—should we be surprised by this?

We should not, of course. The reason Murdoch was, is, a gung-ho ultra rightist has nothing to do with his

■ RTE workers are among the most productive in Europe. A 1989 survey of European broadcasting stations (including BBC, ITN etc) showed that they had the highest output per head of staff in TV and the second highest in radio (only Belgium being higher).

■ RTE last year made a profit of at least £8 million. It had an income of £56 million from advertising and £98 million from licence fees, the RTE Guide and other profitable spin-offs.

■ RTE workers are not "overpaid" and "underworked"—unlike the management who

are attacking them. Some in RTE work thirteen-hour shifts with few breaks. A sound operator earns between £14,303 to £16,403 a year, while the camera operators at the centre of the dispute earn between £16,644 and £21,605. Pocket money for an RTE manager!

Scabalong Cassidy

SIPTU'S Regional Executive Committee member Liam Cassidy tried last week to undermine the unity of the strike. He even encouraged people to break the strike.

He condemned the camera crew members as "selfish and morally wrong". He said that they shouldn't look for support from other members who earned less than the camera men. They shouldn't be standing on a picket line with "highly paid personalities". The strike itself is, according to this Liam Cassidy, an "abuse of democracy".

ABUSING

It is he, not the strikers, who is "abusing democracy". Members' meetings have noted nearly unanimously to continue the strike. Nobody has voted for the views that Cassidy represents. He had no right to take his scabby remarks to the press.

RTE strikers had more sense. His remarks have had no effect and have been treated with contempt by the strikers.

He should be forced to resign from the Regional Executive Committee: On Tuesday night the Education Branch Committee condemned his statements. Other SIPTU branches should do the same and see this man out of the union. With "friends" like Liam Cassidy, who needs enemies?

Cassidy claimed that the strike was started by "a small group of politically-motivated people". In fact he was quite right, and we can now name them—RTE management!

crass "Aussie" attitudes and everything to do with his being a conscious class warrior. The bosses, whether at Wapping or Donnybrook, tend to be far more class conscious than the workers.

You never hear a bosses' organisation breaking ranks and slagging off one of their own in the middle of a dispute, do you? Or holding back cooperation so as to weaken a fellow boss who's in confrontation with workers?

If our side showed half the solidarity which they show we'd have put manners on the boss class long ago.

The message is: only socialist politics can provide us with a clear view of the way forward. And only socialist organisation can put the politics into practice.



The SWM

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